

# UPSTAIRS BULLETIN

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TO CHOOSE WILLFULLY to perform in New York and face it's well known biased opinions on anything not New York based seems fool hearty. There is no leave-way for opinions on taste not their own. Facing that, JOHN NEUMEIER came off extremly well on his HAMBURG BALLET performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. We did not get all the reviews but did see a great many. None were really bad - some were begrudgingly good and an equal share excellent. Clive Barnes of the New York Post wrote - "Neumeier's Mahlers Third Sympony is an incredible achievement - one of those masterpieces that permits a man's entire career to be revaluated." And again "Neumeier's visting card as - one of the major classic choreographers of the century."

KATHY JOHNSON was born in Florida where she began her training. She came to Chicago to study with Stone Camryn and was in our spring concerts at St. Alphonsus. From Chicago she went to New York to study modern with Twyla Tharp and Manuel Alum. She danced in the Eliot Feld Ballet a couple of seasons and currently studies with Gabriella Darvash. For a southern girl she has remarkable pertinacity and we admire her for it. She is currently a member of the Paul Taylor Dance Company.

We first met CHAUNCE CONKLIN at Jacobs Pillow as a student in 1949 where we were performing and teaching. As he lived near Chicago, we offered him a scholarship to continue to study with us. He accepted and was promptly at the casting of "Alice in Wonderland". Chaunce fit into so many parts that we both got enthused - he ended up as the March Hare and was the funniest we ever had in that part. During those rehearsals I felt I had a genius comedian on my hands and when I approached him with an offer to develop that possibility he confessed that he was married with a family. A teacher has many such set backs - but I accepted it and he went to his family in Bloomington

where he now has a highly successful Dinner Theatre in its 16th year. The Conklin Players Theatre is in the Peoria/Bloomington area. They now have a complex of 6½ acres which includes the Theatre, an outdoor stage, summer band, and a 14 room brick house built in 1857 which once housed Lincoln as he traveled the mid-state area. With the dinner, Musicals and Plays are presented. Over the years an impressive list of productions have been presented - most with comedy as their theme.

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I like very much people telling me about their childhood, but they'll have to be very quick or else I'll be telling of mine.

- Dylan Thomas.

Were I to be born again - to live another lifetime - there is little that I would want different.

I wouldn't change the drab times for the brighter times. We learn more about living through the struggle-periods. Our characters become stronger and richer from the struggle.

I have been through the very High's and the very Low's and while I may never have received the recognition I had dreamed of as a dancer, as a teacher or as a creator, both Mr. Stone and I have developed hundreds of dancers and teachers who, if they are the least bit generous at heart, may in some way enrich our reputations in the future - at least in the Chicago School of dance.

Most of our students, except those who were born in the 30's, had an easier time to live through, but mine was the very best for me.

Thank You Angus and Rose.

## MY CHILDHOOD.

Theodore Roosevelt was President at the time. Maude Adams had opened in "Peter Pan" in New York. John Barrymore was making his first appearance in Chicago in a play called "Magda". "Sweet Adeline" was composed and sung for the first time. Panama and the United States signed a treaty on the proposed Panama Canal. Orville and Wilbur Wright made their first successful airplane flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. And four famous artists, Paul Gauguin, Hugo Wolf, Camille Pissarro and James Mac Neil Whistler had died during the year. It was also the time of the great Iroquois fire in Chicago, where during the performance of Eddie Foy, 588 people were killed.

All these events were happening at about the time Angus and Rose were expecting their first born. Angus and Rose, my parents, were greatly relieved when I arrived, most especially my Mother, because it was the first and last time in my life that I was ever late. A month old at birth and a generous ten pounds. My Father boasted and passed out "White Owls" to all his friends, and Mother, who did not feel so well, remained in the hospital for another two weeks.

There are those who pride themselves on their perfect recall of every detail in their first years on earth. I was never so braggadocio of these early years. My earliest recall was of hearing the folks talk of Teddy Roosevelt's visit to our city from his ranch at Wibeaux, Montana. No details, mind you, I just recall. My next memory was one of an artistic nature. I must have been about six and was left at home with my brother Ray for a short time while the parents went visiting. We lived in a traditional little white house which Ray and I must have disapproved of because when the parents returned home we had splattered it as far as we could reach with red paint. I presume we were punished but here again my recall fails me.

I cannot say I remember when, but I do remember that the family would take horse and buggy trips, some 60 miles over the continental divide into the Blackfoot Valley to visit our Great Uncles who had homesteaded there in the

early 60's. We would camp there for the entire summer. Much of our time was spent listening to the tales old Sandy and Angus would regale us with about the two great events of their pioneering days -- "The Winter of the Blue Snow" and the "Big Burn". The latter was a great forest fire that swept through the entire west in the 70's leaving much destruction. As the fire burnt through the valley they put all their valuables in Willow Creek to save them but fortunately, the fire went around their cabin sites. How much truth or fantasy is hard to say but to this day, one can see in the timber growth great patches of young jack pines where it had been burnt off about that time. In those days there was nothing to do but let a fire run its course. Many years later, I had read in the Paul Bunyan legends about the great winter of the Blue Snow and I could remember Angus telling us of this dreadful winter when their houses were buried in the blue snow. Livestock and wild life perished by the thousands for lack of food and care. A generous supply of wood kept their cabins warm and not until a great chinook came were they freed from the snow. Then followed the floods that added to the destruction and misery of an already bad situation.

My first schooling was at the Kessler School outside of Helena, under Nona B. Eddy, a truly remarkable teacher and influence in her community. Her projects were always ones making use of our spare time and influencing her subjects to enjoy the simple natural things around one. Saturday evening dance classes, one of her projects, were taught by the parents for children beginning at the age of 6. Dancing in those days was something one had to learn, as we did the Schottische, the Polka, Rye Waltz, the Varsouvienne, Two Step, Waltz, and the most beautiful of all, the Three Step, with its graceful dip on every fourth bar of the music. All that, along with learning the intricacies of the rousing square dances.

The spring season always brought out the best in Nona B. who loved this time of year and made everyone share it with her. Arbor Day was religiously observed with tree plantings in various parks and school yards all over the city. On May Day we would be sent into the foothills to gather the first spring flowers, anemones, yellow bells, the buttercups and the saucy shooting stars. They were hung on the neighbors' door knobs. And no door was ever without its colorful

basket of wild flowers. The spring season always culminated with the elaborate demonstration of folk dances in the public parks and the high point was the intricate weaving of the Maypole Dance with all the students, boys and girls alike, in their best bib and tucker.

When I was about six my Great Uncle Sandy passed away at the grand age of 95 and was waked in our front parlor before the funeral. He had been a great favorite of mine and much against my parents' will, I had insisted on being allowed to go to the service and to the cemetery as well.

During the brief service the heavy scent of the funeral flowers permeated the entire house. Even at that age, I loved flowers but had never been around them in such profusion. I was becoming pale around the gills as the family was loaded into the enclosed carriages for the long drive out to Forestvale Cemetery in the valley. The continual jogging of the hack and the stuffy air inside made me unpleasantly ill and the entire retinue was held up half way to the cemetery while I escaped into the sagebrush to relive my stomach of its contents. The balance of the service, that of laying my favorite great Uncle into the ground was uneventful and in order, with my parents heartily wishing they had left me at home with my younger brothers.

Soon after Sandy's death, the family moved to Lincoln to live in the old homestead cabin and the next four years were full of adventure for my brothers and myself. The cabin was only a two-room affair so it was necessary to pitch a tent with a wooden floor at the back of the house for the boys to sleep in. In winter we heated rocks to put in the bed for heat, dressing in the kitchen and dashing hurriedly into the tent and into bed. Huddled together, we could hear the timber wolves and coyotes howling in the meadow during the night. We wore pajamas that were like cover-alls with feet and often in the mornings we would run about in the deep snow drifts (and it was often forty below zero) before entering the cabin for breakfast. The cold Montana winters did not seem a hardship to us, we found much to enjoy in them.

The Saturday night routine of sundown to sunrise dances were as much pleasure as any one could want in a lifetime. In a horse drawn sleigh we drove possibly ten miles to these dances.

Promptly at nine the orchestra struck up the first dance and from then on, Mother and Son, Father and daughter, Grand Pa and Grand Ma, lovers, and hardly-acquainted mixed with great delight until dawn. About one there was a rest for a lunch. Children who had faded out could be checked with the Saturday night groceries and picked up in the morning. Promptly at 2, the orchestra struck up again and when the dancers heard "Home Sweet Home", they were back to the sleighs and home.

While in Lincoln the local school was some 12 miles distant from our cabin and each morning I was put on my Indian pinto pony - 'Old Baldy' - to head out for the Herrin place where their three children were waiting for me. In our round about way, picking up others as we went on, we would arrive at the school 8 or 10 strong. The older Herrin boy, Herbert, took the responsibility of my horse as I was inexperienced with a horse. We often raced home after school and on one occasion, Herbert had not tightened my saddle cinch and at breakneck speed my saddle turned and I was off the horse and on the ground. Old Baldy stopped instantly and I was unhurt. In the future Old Baldy was to be my guardian and companion on many an adventure.

Each season brought special adventures to a young boy in the country. When spring first burst forth with all its flowers that had been dormant the bigger part of the year, we were off for the foothills. Hunting flowers that shoot out of the ground for a few weeks and then disappear into the ground for the rest of the year. The very first yellow bell (*Fritillaria*), lady slipper (*Calypso*), and dogtooth violets were exciting to find. Later the meadows would change color from day to day with shooting stars, camas lilies, red elephant ears, etc. The pastures displayed white chickweed, rosy pink moss, champion wind flowers, sugar-bowl flowers and the early lupine.

Summer had its flowers too - roses, sticky geraniums, fireweed, owls clover, monkey flowers and butter and eggs. But summer presented other adventures. The old swimming hole in Willow Creek, where we would execute diving feats in three feet of water with our snow white collie. Somehow we would invariably leave our underwear on the creek bank and we marched back later to retrieve it. Or the day we tried to destroy a nest of yellow jackets in the ground

and were practically annihilated by them as they attacked, with us running and screaming for home. The bees were faster than we, by far. Mother stripped us of our clothing in the parlor and when completely denuded found that of clothing we were covered with stinging welts where our enemy had gotten the best of us. Baking soda relieved them a bit and it was a painful lesson we did not soon forget - to live and let live, whether insect or human.

Up until my 10th birthday I went to this country school where one incredible teacher taught all 8 grades in one very small room. She surely must have been an amazing person to manage such an assortment of material. When I reached the 5th grade the family moved back into the city where I was found to be more advanced than city children (having heard everything up to the 8th grade) and I was ushered immediately into the 6th grade. For the next three grades I had really dedicated teachers - Stinchfield, Israel and Owsley. Shortly before my 13th birthday I graduated from the 8th grade. In Montana at that time graduation from the 7th and 8th grades was after passing a State Board of Education examination -tough and also a test on the teacher.

During these years the family lived on the outskirts of Helena, where it was possible to keep a cow, a horse, and chickens for eggs. Each day the cow had to be milked and all the other barnyard inhabitants fed and cared for before going to school. Being the oldest, this was my task which in many ways I enjoyed except on the bitter cold winter mornings. My brothers and I had many pets and each was expected to care for his own. My favorites, two snow white ducks, would follow me just about everywhere I would allow them to and would come helter skelter when whistled for. Spring was our best time together and the ducks loved the times we went picking water cress for my Father's store.

In Spring we always had a large garden, cared for by the boys, and much of our food came from this effort. Summers we could make spending money by picking strawberries, blackberries and gooseberries, and working in nearby truck gardens. Our earnings were always gauged on our output of work accomplished by being paid a cent or two a basket for the berries and a like sum for string beans and peas. The temptation to eat up the profit was soon quelled after getting sick the first time on overtasting as one picked -- the peas especially were the hardest on the stomach -- but were they good - those first few tastes!!!!

The matter of sex education was not a thing to be taught in schools in those days. In fact, it was something one did not mention. One Easter, my Father innocently gave me a pair of rabbits, a beautiful white one and a very spotted one, which I housed in our barn at the back of our lot. They thrived and took more and more of my time caring for them. One day, about a year later, my Father decided to find out how I was spending my time and visited the barn where he found rabbits bouncing all over the place. With tears in my eyes, something like 40 rabbits were turned loose in the foothills and that was my interest in rabbits. I'm not certain I understood 'how' that number arrived at - I just accepted it as a simple problem in multiplication.

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